

**Statement to be included in the record of the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources, February 28, 2013 hearing on “Waiving Work Requirements in the TANF Program”**

**Submitted by Linda Meric, Executive Director, 9to5**

The federal TANF program’s current work requirements create obstacles to reducing poverty for our nation’s low-income families. The emphasis on “work-first” for participants and on meeting work participation requirements for states has meant that families often lose TANF support but continue to live in poverty.

States should be encouraged to test alternative approaches to improve employment outcomes for low-income parents and economic stability outcomes for low-income families. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services should be allowed to grant waivers to states that have a plan to implement innovative strategies to help parents successfully prepare for, find, and retain employment.

The success of the TANF program should be measured by its effectiveness in reducing poverty by assisting low-income parents to succeed in stable, living wage employment. Currently, parents move from TANF to unstable employment with low wages and few, if any, benefits. Child and family well-being don’t improve, and welfare leavers often suffer increased hardship.

More emphasis on education and training for stable long-term employment in living wage jobs with advancement opportunities is one critical strategy for moving families out of poverty. Parents who complete postsecondary education and training programs increase their earnings and employment at double the rates of parents in “work-first” programs.

Additionally, subsidized employment and training programs tested under the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund had positive results for participants moving from subsidized to good permanent employment. TANF also needs to provide adequate investment in the supports that parents need to be successful in employment – such as consideration for participants’ caregiving responsibilities, child care, transportation, family violence services and protections, health and mental health services, education and training, career ladders for family-supporting jobs and protections for immigrant families.

States should be encouraged to invest in these types of alternative approaches to improve employment outcomes for low-income parents. They have shown positive results for moving low-income parents to family-supporting employment and their families to economic stability. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services should be allowed to grant waivers to states that have a plan to implement these innovative strategies.

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